

Epilogue to the Mendeléeff Centenary in Russia

Travaux du Congrès Jubilaire Mendéléév
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iv+471+10 plates. (Moscow et Leningrad :
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THE Mendeléeff centenary congress held in Leningrad during September 1934 was described directly afterwards in *NATURE* (134, 799; 1934). The official report has just appeared.

The first volume contains the speeches of the Russian organizers and foreign guests, and all the lectures delivered in Leningrad. It is obviously intended for readers both in Russia and abroad; all the official Russian speeches are here followed by French versions, Russian lectures by translations into French or German, while lectures given in either of these languages—English was not used at the congress—are rendered into Russian also. There is no need to give a list of the speakers and their subjects, as these are already mentioned in the article in *NATURE* referred to above. Those lectures dealing with modern scientific questions have lost something of their topical interest through the long delay, though the various historical contributions are scarcely affected by the two years' procrastination.

Most of the foreign delegates to the congress were unable to follow the Russian speeches. While probably they were all impressed by the picturesque welcome offered by the delegation of Moscow chemical workmen, only now can they realize that the address spoken by their representative was one of the most significant delivered at the opening meeting, giving an account of the development of the Russian chemical industry; and that Prof. Nametkin's lecture traces in a most interesting manner Mendeléeff's endeavour to promote the petroleum industry in Russia. Those of Mendeléeff's admirers who had so far venerated him only as an investigator will be glad to learn how energetically he used his influence to direct this industry in the way he thought best for the benefit of his country.

The lectures delivered during the less formal continuation of the celebrations in Moscow; a few more already held in February 1934 at a meeting of the Russian Academy; and several papers which were only presented in manuscript and not read, form the subject of the second volume. The contributions by the Russian men of science frequently throw illuminating side-lights on Mendeléeff's rich and unconventional

personality; Prof. S. I. Vavilov, in a paper on the importance of physics in Mendeléeff's scientific activities, incidentally mentions that his various interests, and their simultaneity, are reflected in his private library: it contains many books, bound by himself, which unite in the same volume novels with chemical and mathematical papers.

Some of the authors have taken the opportunity of extending their addresses. Prof. Wilh. Palmaer (Stockholm) presents in no less than fifty pages a survey of his own and his co-workers' researches on the corrosion of metals; two excellent plates in colour illustrate his descriptions. In a few other cases one may be inclined to regret that the authors have strictly confined themselves to their spoken addresses; if, for example, Prof. W. Noddack (Freiburg) in his remarks on the Periodic System criticizes the evidence brought forward by some investigators for the existence of the elements 61, 85 and 87, readers may ask whether the proof which he himself offered so early as 1925 for the discovery of element 43 (masurium) is any more valid; as no confirmation has been forthcoming, it might be advisable to extend his well-founded scepticism also to this place of the Periodic System.

The delay in publication is probably due to an endeavour to produce a technically faultless book, and it must be acknowledged that the two stately volumes show none of those shortcomings in paper or print so frequently met with in Russian publications. This excellent typographic achievement and the great care devoted to the German and French texts and translations deserve high praise; although they may not always be linguistically quite correct, it is very remarkable that the Russian printers and proof-readers are able to produce such long and difficult treatises practically free from misprints in foreign languages.

At the end of the second part the names of the ten honorary presidents—the list being headed by J. V. Stalin—34 presidents, 34 members of the Organizing Committee, 28 foreign and 253 Soviet delegates, and additional official details are given. Many good reproductions of pictures adorn the volumes, amongst them portraits of Mendeléeff's father and mother, which are probably little known outside Russia.

The efforts made in 1934 by the Russian authorities and scientific workers to celebrate one of their greatest compatriots are now put on record in an appropriate manner by these two fine volumes.

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